Mayadhar Mansinha

Durga Charan Kuanr

Makers of Indian Literature

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The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda. 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.

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Mayadhar Mansinha

DURGA CHARAN KUANR

SAHITYA AKADEMI

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PREFACE

This monograph on Mayadhar Mansinha written under the auspices of the Sahitya Akademi, for the Makers of Indian Literature series, is a modest attempt to assess the contributions of a versatile modern Oriya poet and writer. Mansinha was essentially a poet though he tried his hand in almost all the branches of literature: poetry, *kavya*, drama, poetic drama, travelogue, biography, autobiography, essay, literary criticism, novel, short story and children's literature leaving his own individual mark in each. He excelled as a romantic poet and dominated Oriya poetry for a long time. He was the most prolific poet of his generation having to his credit about fifteen anthologies of poetry, six *kavyas* (which include *khanda kavyas* or long narrative poems) and a couple of poetic dramas. Oriya lyric and narrative poetry reached a high level of perfection in his hands. His strong individualism and bold expression of views, however unpleasant they might be, often created a storm of controversy and warmed up literary

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and intellectual discussions. He was a lover of beauty both of human form and nature, an idealist and a dreamer, who often found himself out of tune with the realities of life around him. After the unprecedented success of his earlier love lyrics, the realities of the world and his own personal sufferings made him a rebel against social, religious and cultural hypocrisy and injustice, which find expression in his collection of poems: *krush* (Cross), *jeevan chita* (The burning pyre of life), and other poems written during the middle period of his literary career. These poems are also marked by a note of melancholy and a fervent longing for self-surrender at the altar of some Supreme Power. Though not an avowed atheist, he was against idolatery, priesthood, caste system and all kinds of religious dogmas and superstitions. According to him the organised religions of the world dominated by the priests, the clergy and the mullahs had done more harm to mankind than good. His zeal for social and religious reform made him inclined toward Buddhism which he thought was basically a humanistic religion. Though he did not believe in any religious creed, he finally got his intellectual and spiritual solace in humanism and universal love which were amply demonstrated in his *kamalayana*, a full-length *kavya* in two parts and other poems written in his mellowed years.

Mansinha was also a powerful writer in English and had got his Ph.D. degree in English literature from a British University in 1938, the first Oriya to earn such an academic distinction. From among his notable works in English, *The Saga of the Land*

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of Jagannath, The History of Oriya Literature, Kalidas and Shakespeare, and *Fakir Mohan Senapati* deserve special mention.

I am thankful to the authorities of the Sahitya Akademi, in general, and to Prof. J. M. Mohanty of the Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, in particular for having given me the opportunity to write this monograph.

The English renderings of Mayadhar Mansinha's poems or poetry passages given in this book are by the present writer.

D. C. Kuanr

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I

THE POET WITH A STORMY CAREER

Mayadhar Mansinha was born on 13 November 1905, at Nandala, a village situated on the shores of the picturesque Chilka lake in the district of Puri in Orissa. His parents having died in his early childhood, he was brought up and educated by his nearest in kin who belonged to a lower middle class family. He had his early education in the village school and spent his most impressionable childhood and adolescent years in rural surroundings roaming about the desolate sand dunes frequented by black deer, the tidal creeks of the blue-watered Chilka, and the shady groves of mango, coconut, palm and casurina. The beautiful natural setting of his native village and the simple life of the villagers with their numerous customs, festivals and folklore left a lasting impression in the sensitive mind of young Mansinha, which has greatly influenced his writings in later years. The sturdy peasantry of his village to which stock the poet himself belonged once formed the national militia of the independent

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kings of Orissa and still retained something of their old valour and displayed swordsmanship and other martial arts during Dussera and other festivals. Mansinha inherited something of the simplicity, straightforwardness and impetuosity of his ancient forebears which often landed him in trouble both in his literary and service careers.

Mansinha was a brilliant student, but due to poverty he had to struggle through his student career often taking up private coaching to supplement the meagre financial assistance that he received from his not-so-well-to-do kith and kin. He had his early education at Parikud Garh, an island township inside the Chilka lake, and at Banpur situated on the western bank of the lake. He matriculated from Khurda Government High English School in 1926, securing a first division. Financial hardship could not deter the determined young man from the pursuit of higher studies. In 1930 he graduated from Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, with Honours in English, and passed his M.A. examination in English with credit from Patna University in 1932. In those days it was difficult, even for the highly educated, to get a suitable job in Orissa. In spite of his brillant academic records Mansinha had to serve as a school teacher for some years. But his thirst for knowledge was ever insatiable. While serving as a teacher in the former feudatory state of Kalahandi, by borrowing money from some of his friends and with his meagre savings he proceeded to England to do his Ph.D. in English at the Durham University. While in England, he cooked his own food and for sometime had to manage with one suit of woolen

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clothes. He returned to India in 1939 after obtaining Ph.D. degree for his learned thesis on a comparative study of Kalidas and Shakespeare. He was the first Oriya to earn such an academic distinction in English literature from a foreign University and a rousing reception was accorded to the young scholar-poet at Cuttack which was the cultural and commercial nerve-centre of Orissa. But life was never to be a bed of roses for Mansinha. Though in the thirties and early forties of this century he had already established himself as the most promising poet and writer of the younger generation, conditions in Orissa were not conductive then, even for the most popular and talented litterateurs to earn a decent living by their literary labours. So, to sustain himself and his family Mansinha had to seek for a job. He was, in his long chequered service career with many ups and downs, a college lecturer, school teacher, Educational Adviser to the Eastern States Agency, Adult Education Officer, Inspector of Schools, and the Principal of G. M. College, Sambalpur, a premier government college in the state. His independent and uncompromising spirit as far as principles and personal convictions were concerned, often landed him in troubles. While in service he published articles in newspapers and periodicals, criticising the accepted educational policies of the government which he did not approve, and did not hesitate to expose even the top brass of the official hierarchy when they were wrong. It is no wonder that such an independent minded officer had to suffer in the prevailing political and bureaucratic set up. He was frequently transferred from one post to another and at times was without a job. Had he been a bit tactful and

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restrained with his pen, a man of his intelligence, high academic achievements, sincerity and integrity, could have easily climbed to the highest echelon in the educational hierarchy in the state, but he was made of different mettle. His stubbornness and personal predilections often created embarassing situations for himself as well as his official and political bosses. On one occasion, as a punishment, he was compelled by the authorities to join a college as lecturer even for a day where the Principal was much junior to him. But Mansinha was not a person to take things lying down. He used his facile pen in exposing the bureaucratic machinations and misdeeds of his tormentors. He has recounted the bitter experiences of his service life in a semi-autobiographical work entitled *sikhyabitra gatha* (The saga of an educationist) published in 1956. The happiest and most fruitful years of his service career was probably the principalship of the Gangadhar Meher College, Sambalpur, from 1949 to 1956. He was a great admirer of poet Gangadhar Meher(1862-1924) after whom the college was named. Dr. Mansinha tried to build up this premier educational institution of western Orissa on a sound footing by inculcating a spirit of discipline, idealism and personal rapport among students, guardians and teachers, so essential for the general well-being of an educational institution. A college picnic was organised every year in which all the students and the staff of the college with their families participated. Extramural lectures, seminars, debating and literary competitions were organised at regular intervals which kept the general academic and cultural atmosphere of the college enlivened. With a view to building up the students as useful citizens

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of the future he had drawn up separate codes of conduct for men and women students of the college which were prominently displayed at vantage points in the college building. He provided the college with a cooperative store, canteen, a dairy and a vegetable garden for the benefit of the students and the staff. He looked upon the college as a big family of which he was the patriarch, loved and adored by all. People still remember with great admiration Dr. Mansinha's idealistic vision, sincere efforts and missionary zeal in making Gangadhar Meher College a model institution of higher learning.

Mansinha had combined in him some of the admirable traits of the East and the West. He had imbibed the western sense of duty, discipline, punctuality, forthrightness and a liberal social outlook, and had at the same time a deep love for Indian culture and tradition, which are amply reflected in his own personal life style as well as his numerous writings both in Oriya and English. Mansinha was an idealist and dreamer all his life. His wife Hemalata Mansinha, though a writer by her own right, was more practical and bore the brunt of domestic chores with fortitude during the unhappy days when her poet-husband was pushed from pillar to post in his uncertain service career. Together they brought up their three sons and two daughters under strict discipline and took all possible care to educate them. The eldest son Dr. Lalatendu Mansinha is the Professor of Geo-Physics in an American university, the second Lalitendu Mansinha who had topped in Indian Administrative Service examination opted for Indian Foreign Service and has since been

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appointed to various responsible posts in Indian embassies abroad. He had married the reputed Odissi and Bharatanatyam dancer Sonal Mansinha. The third son Labanyendu and his wife are both in Indian Administrative Service. The two daughters Nivedita and Sanghamitra are happily married. The death of a daughter in her tender age had greatly aggrieved the poet which has evoked some heart-touching elegies from his grief-stricken pen.

Mansinha's literary career was as tumultuous as his service career. The publication of his collection of love lyrics *dhupa* (Incense) in 1931 had created an uproar in Oriya literary circle and the young poet was subjected to bitter criticism for his uninhibited expression of promiscous love. Most of the poems of *dhupa* appearing previously in the reputed Oriya literary monthly the *utkal sahitya* had attracted admiration for their freshness of language, poetic metre and lyrical grace, but the orthodox section of the society raised serious objections to Mansinha's love lyrics. But he was undaunted by such criticism, and published articles defending *dhupa* with convincing arguments.

Dr. Mansinha was a man of strong likes and dislikes and was bitterly critical of mediocrity and literary pretensions. His habit of expressing unpleasant truths earned him more foes than friends. Things came to a pass when his *History of Oriya Literature* written in English under the auspices of the Sahitya Akademi was published in 1962. In this book he has deviated from the conventional pattern by not giving a mere catalogue of names of the authors

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and their works. Within the limited scope of the book he has focused his attention on those authors who have made significant contributions to the growth and development of Oriya literature and without fear or favour made critical assessment of individual authors from his own point of view. Some contemporary authors whose names did not find mention in the book or on whom the writer had made some adverse comments were furious at him and started a campaign of vilification against him. It must have pained Mansinha to see to what unseemly extent his detractors could stoop, but such hostile criticism did not make him change his views. In the Oriya version of the book prepared later he has made no substantial changes in the book except making certain minor additions and alterations.

Mansinha had the inherent stoicism to face the odds of life with equanimity. He extended a warm welcome to friends and foes alike. His jovial spirit and childlike loud-laughter did not desert him even in the worst days of his life. Though he bore the vicissitudes of life with Spartan courage and endurance yet the bitter experience of his life have found expression in some of his poems:

> Struggles of life have left their scars on my body,
> And my eyes are always filled with tears
> For being a victim to sufferings and injustice,
> O World! what have you given me in life,
> I don't know what is good living,
> But have seen all around me
> How the knaves, the proud and the uncultured prosper.
> I have also seen abject poverty and inhuman sufferings of men

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Both Nature and God conspiring against the poor
And the honest subjected to neglect and humiliation
While all kinds of happiness are bestowed on those useless persons
Who have no contribution to the country and the people.

'ardhasatabdi' (Half a century)

Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha passed away on 11 October 1973, in the full-moon night of the month of Aswina, when the unmarried girls of Orissa celebrate with great rejoicing the festival of 'Kumar Purnima'. The night was stormy and the full-moon had hidden its face behind thick clouds as if to mourn the death of the poet who all his life was a great lover of beauty and the moonlight.

In the later part of his life Mansinha had written a poem entitled 'samadhi' (The grave) which serves as a fitting epitaph to his sacred memory:

O Lord! you have filled my life with many humiliations,
It is benefit of everything save deception,
But don't give me further uncalled for shame
By measuring the little honour that I have
With the yardstick of power and pelf.
Let me live or die as a mere poet
Whose eyes are filled with tears for others.
.....
In the season of spring when the flowers bloom,
Or in autumn moonlight
If the young men and women of my country
Come and offer flowers of love on my grave,
That will be my best reward,
The greatest honour of my whole life time.

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II

HIS LITERARY PREDECESSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES

Oriya literature with its hoary past had made a great leap forward in the 15th century A.D., with the poetical compositions of the great epic poet Sarala Das and was further enriched by the devotional poetry of the saint-poets of the 16th century known as the Panchasakhas, the vast storehouse of medieval ornate poetry, and a host of other poets and writers through the centuries. The spread of English education and the impact of western literature had ushered in a new era in Oriya literature toward the latter half of the 19th century which has been termed as the Modern Age. The three chief architects of this new age in Oriya literature are: poet Radhanath Ray, Bhaktakavi Madhusudan Rao and *Vyasakavi* Fakirmohan Senapati. Bhaktakavi Madhusudan, famous for his devotional lyrics, also introduced into Oriya poetry certain western modes of poetic expression like sonnet, ode, elegy and ballad which have been successfully used by subsequent

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generations of Oriya poets. Fakirmohan is the father of Oriya shortstory and novel. His greatness chiefly rests on his four novels, short stories and autobiography though he had translated the epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* into Oriya and had written some excellent poems with a realistic approach using the spoken language of the people. The chief credit for laying the foundation of modern Oriya poetry, however, goes to Radhanath who eschewing the ornate poetic style and diction of medieval Oriya poetry gave it a new dimension and significance. Radhanath was well read in Sanskrit, Oriya and western literatures and wrote long story-poems or *khanda kavyas* borrowing stories and legends from western as well as indigenous sources. He so skilfully wove the borrowed stories into the fabric of his narratives intermingling them with Orissan history, legend, tradition and natural setting that his unsuspecting readers had no difficulty in enjoying the narratives as being enacted on Orissan soil. Radhanath Ray was a romantic poet par excellence. In his poetry hitherto little known beauty spots of Orissa, its rivers, lakes, hills and dales assumed new charm and significance. In his long descriptive poem 'chilka', the picturesque lake Chilka forms the central character. As a patriotic poet he imbued his poetry with patriotic sentiments by recalling the ancient glory of Orissa. Like Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, the presiding gods and goddesses of different parts of orissa throng his *kavyas* often presiding over the destiny of the heroes and heroines.

Mayadhar Mansinha, from among his predecessors, was a great admirer of poet Radhanath Ray to whom he has paid respectful homage in several of his writings. In three long essays published in his essay-collection *kavi o kavita*, he has paid glowing tributes to the great poet

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in no uncertain terms. In spite of all his individual experiments in poetic style, language and treatment of theme, Mansinha remains a true successor to Radhanath Ray in Oriya poetry, as his distinguished contemporary the mystic poet Baikunthanath Patnaik was a successor to Bhaktakavi Madhusudan's devotional lyrics. Like Radhanath, Mansinha was well-versed in Sanskrit, Oriya and western literature, but in his half a dozen *kavyas* or long story-poems, instead of going to the western sources in search of stories, he has picked up themes straight from comtemporary life, the *puranas*, Orissan legends and folklore. Radhanath was a poet of transition— a transition from firmly established medieval ornate poetic style to modern romantic poetry is a big leap indeed. In his new poetry, Radhanath has tried to deviate from the ornate style and diction of the medieval poets, but the tradition was too powerful and heavy on him to shake it off completely. He has not only followed the medieval convention by taking the princes and the princesses as the heroes and heroines of his long story-poems or *khanda kavyas*, in the use of language, similes, metaphors and the supernatural elements he has followed the old masters to a considerable extent. Though Mansinha is an able successor to the romantic tradition of Radhanath's poetry, he was essentially a lyric poet and in poetic style and spirit he belonged to a different period when much change had taken place both in the western and Indian literary scene. Mansinha's early poems appeared in local oriya periodicals more than two decades after Radhanath Ray's death in 1908. Those were also the days when powerful influence of Rabindranath Tagore's poetic genius touched almost all Indian poets.

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The other notable Oriya poets and writers who seem to have left a deep impression in the mind of poet Mansinha are Gopabandhu Das, Nilakantha Das and Godavarish Mishra who are known as the poets of the Satyabadi school. The Satyabadi Bana Vidyalaya founded by Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das in the first decade of this century had become the centre of nationalistic activities in Orissa. Being influenced by the noble ideals and the spirit of sacrifice of Utkalmani Gopabandhu, highly educated and talented persons like Nilakantha Das, Godavarish Misra, Acharya Harihara and Krupasindhu Mishra had joined the Satyabadi school as teachers on a nominal pay. It was an open-air school and the students were taught under *bakul* and *chhuriana* trees.The teachers took personal care of the students and tried to build them up as useful citizens of the future by inculcating into them a spirit of discipline, sacrifice and patriotism. Besides their academic activities, the learned teachers of the school had devoted themselves to nationalistic activities and pursuit of literature.

The period of misfortune for Orissa had started since she lost her independence in 1568 A.D. The people of Orissa were subjected to gross exploitation, tyranny and humiliation under successive Afghan, Mughal and Maratha misrule. In the wake of the British rule Orissa was dismembered and Oriya speaking tracts were annexed to the neighbouring Madras Presidency, the Central Provinces and Bengal Presidency for administrative convenience in complete disregard to the racial, linguistic and cultural integrity of an ancient people. Politically, economically, educationally and in matters of communication Orissa was the most neglected region and became the fertile ground for exploitation by outsiders. The devastating famine of

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1866 A.D., known as Na Anka famine, in which hundreds of thousands of men, women and children died out of starvation had broken the backbone of the people and had sapped whatever little self-confidence they still possessed. At one time the separate identities of the Oriyas and their language were questioned. To bring about an all round development of the Oriya speaking people scattered over the neighbouring provinces a movement for the creation of a separate province of Orissa had started under the able leadership of Utkal Gourab Madhusudan Das in which the Satyabadi leaders had taken a leading part along with their active participation in the national struggle for independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. A deep love for Orissa's art, architecture, culture and a legitimate pride in her ancient glory, along with a sense of sorrow and resentment at her present miserable plight find expression in the writings of the Satyabadi school of poets and writers. Utkalmani Gopabandhu in several of his poems written in a simple and evocative style has given a heart-touching picture of the miserable condition of the people of Orissa, and Nilakantha Das in his imaginative *kavya, mayadevi,* based on Orissan history and legends, has recalled the ancient glory of Orissa in a forceful poetic style of his own. The poems, plays, novels and ballads of Godavarish Mishra express the same patriotic sentiment. As the hopes, aspirations and general conditions of the people are bound to be reflected in their national literature, the depressing conditions of Orissa in those days should be borne in mind for a proper assessment of the writings of the Satyabadi school of litterateurs.

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That the sensitive and patriotic spirited poet Mayadhar Mansinha had a spiritual affinity with the poets and writers of the Satyabadi school is proved by his own works. In some of his early poems like 'barabati', 'konarka', 'mahanadire jyostna bihar' and 'bande utkal' while singing the glory of ancient Utkal, he has expressed sorrow and despair at her present degeneration and decay. In many of his other poems, prose pieces and also in his scholarly work. *The Saga of the Land of Jagannath* written mostly to acquaint the non-Oriya readers with the art, architecture, literature, and the varied culture of an ancient people, Mansinha's patriotism is amply evident. While working as the Principal of the Gangadhar Meher College, Sambalpur, he had invited the famous Hungarian indologist Dr. Charles Fabri to come to Orissa to write a book on her art and architecture. Late Dr. Fabri's scholarly book *History of Orissan Art and Architecture* became possible due to the initiative and efforts of Dr. Mansinha.

Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das was the great humanitarian leader of Orissa who had dedicated his life in the service of the poor and the downtrodden people of Orissa. Risking his own life he was moving from village to village to provide succour to the flood and famine stricken people. As Dr. Mansinha observed in one of his essays: 'Gopabandhu knew the very soul of Orissa, as poet Radhanath knew the outward beauty of the land'. It will not escape the notice of any discerning reader of Mansinha how these two elements have been happily fused in his own writings. In many of his poems he has paid respectful homage to the great humanitarian leader Gopabandhu. The first canto of his *kavya, kamalayan*, depicting contemporary life, begins with a description of the famine at Dover, in

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Puri district, where Gopabandhu is supervising the distribution of relief by his dedicated band of volunteers. The noble presence of Gopabandhu brings hope and solace to the famine-stricken multitude:

> Who is he? the crowed makes query in silent admiration,
> And listens to his consoling words with rapt attention,
> While their thousand eyes are fixed on his benign face
> Feeling the heart throbs of the agitated soul.
> O, he is Gopabandhu, the friend of the poor
> Whose heart melting at the sufferings of others
> Flows through his eyes in continuous stream of tears.

Mansinha has also paid high tribute to Nilakantha Das in the scholarly introduction that he wrote to his *konarke* and *mayadevi* *Mayadevi* is an imaginary *kavya* written in Nilakantha's own individualistic style against the background of a glorious period in Orissa's history. The patriotic poems, plays and novels of Godavarish Mishra, particularly his collection of ballads, *alekhika*, based on Orissan legends and folklore, elicited high praise from Mansinha. His admiration for the poets and writers of the Satyabadi school reveals his own patriotic spirit. In evoking the past glories of Orissa through poetry, plays and poetic dramas based on Orissa's history and legends he even excelled his predecessors, the Satyabadi school of poets and writers.

Against this background, it is no wonder that Mansinha had strongly reacted against the Sabuja poets of Orissa who had no deep root in Orissan soil, their chief source of inspiration being the Sabuja Movement in Bengal. When

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the Satyabadi group of poets and writers took a plunge into active politics there was a near-vacuum in Oriya literature in the third decade of the present century which soon was filled in by the Sabujas or the Greens. The chief architects of the Sabuja Movement in Orissa were Annada Sankar Ray, Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, Baikunthanath Patnaik, Harihar Mohapatra and Sarat Chandra Mukherjee who were students of the first year class in Ravenshaw College, in 1921. They had come in contact with the works of Ibsen, Romain Rolland, Bernard Shaw and the English Romantic poets who had brought in a revolutionary change in western literature, and had access to contemporary Bengali literature, particularly the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. At that time Pramatha Choudhury had started a new movement in Bengali literature and was publishing a literary magazine called *Sabuja Patra*. The chief exponent of the Sabuja group in Orissa, Annada Sankar Ray, was well versed both in Western and Bengali literature and was in touch with the Sabuja movement in Bengal. It was he who had given the name Sabuja to the literary group formed by himself and his friends while studying in Ravenshaw College. They had formed a literary association called Nonsense Club which was later transformed into Sabuja Sahitya Samity with *juga-bina* as its literary mouthpiece. These young poets had got the blessings of the veteran editor Biswanath Kar in whose monthly literary magazine *utkal sahitya* their poems were mostly published. Following a new experiment in novel-writing by the Sabujas of Bengal their counterparts in Orissa had also produced a novel called *basanti* in which several writers had jointly participated. In the third decade of this century the Sabuja poets had created quite a stir in Oriya literary circle for their youthful exuberance and bold experiments. Though they

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sang of the fairies and their poetry for most part were vague and dreamy to a fault, still they had introduced into Oriya poetry a lyrical charm and freshness in the use of language, poetic metre and imagery which inspite of initial objections have since formed a part of Oriya literary milieu. The main objections labelled against the Sabuja group in Orissa were that they had completely broken away from the long and rich tradition of Oriya poetry and in thought-contents, language and style they were nearer to the poetry of Tagore and other contemporary Bengali poets. Mansinha who was against all imitations, has strongly criticised the Sabuja poets of Orissa in his critical essay 'para dharma' (Other's cult), though he has admitted that the Sabujas introduced some novelty into Oriya poetry and they were the first in bringing an international awareness into Oriya literature.

The Sabuja movement in Oriya literature was a short-lived affair. The chief exponent of the movement Annada Sankar Ray after getting into Indian Civil Service opted to write in Bengali, and Harihar Mohapatra and Sarat Chandra Mukherjee gave up writing in preference to their professional career. Out of the Sabuja Pancha Sakhas, only Kalindi Charan Panigrahi and Baikunthanath Patnaik continued to write in Oriya and Kalindi Charan in later years shined more as a novelist, short-story writer and essayist, whereas Baikunthanath devoted himself entirely to poetry and established himself as a lyric and mystic poet in Oriya literature. Although Mayadhar Mansinha was a contemporary to the Sabujas, he has maintained a safe distance from the group and has enriched Oriya literature by his own individual contributions.

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III

THE DOYEN OF MODERN ORIYA ROMANTIC POETRY

Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha was a prolific poet. He had six *kavyas,* fifteen collection of poems and a number of poetic plays. Most of these publications have undergone more than one edition and are quite popular. Mansinha is usually labelled as a love poet, especially for some of his widely read and admired earlier love lyrics, whereby the great complexity of his vision as reflected in the vast and varied range of his poetic output is lost sight of. As a romantic poet his poetry is replete with love, patriotism, a strong fascination for the past glories of the land, love of nature, humanism and a deep spiritual longing.

Mansinha started writing poetry quite early in life and by the time he successfully completed his post-graduate studies in English literature in 1932, he was already famous as a poet. 'Konarka', which came out in a

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contemporary literary periodical *baruni*, in 1926, appears to be his first published poem. Among the few Oriya literary monthlies published from Cuttack in those days, the *utkal sahitya* edited by the veteran editor late Biswanath Kar and the *sahakar* edited by late Balakrushna Kar were most popular and enjoyed wide circulation. Both these magazines encouraged young literary talents by publishing their writings in these journals. Some of Mansinha's early poems like 'barabati' (1926), 'prabruta sambhasana' (1927), 'anudha' (1927), 'taruna kabira asha' (1928), 'gopa tarpana' (1928) 'nidrita bhagawan' (1928), 'pranayee' (1929), 'premara parinam' (1929), 'mahanadir jyotsna vihar' (1929) published in the *utkala sahitya*, and 'rupasira puja' (1928), 'suva drusti' (1930), 'rupa devata' (1932), 'barsa sandhya' (1932) and poetic drâma *puspita* (1930) published in the *sahakar* had earned him literary fame while he was still a student. His long narrative poem *upekhita* written in blank verse on the epic sequence related to Lord Rama's refusal of Surpanakha's love, and parts of *sadhavajhia*, a tragic love story written against the background of ancient maritime activities of Orissa, had been serialised in *utkala sahitya* and *sahakar* which bore ample testimony to his skill in story telling in verse. Mansinha had added new dimensions to this *genre* of narrative poetry or *khanda kavya* which was the forte of his predecessor poet Radhanath Roy. Some of his other poems like 'bansira daka' (1927), 'rangoon chithi' (1929), 'gopa prayan' (1931) published in the Ravenshaw College magazine, the *Ravenshavian*, and other periodicals had added to his poetic popularity. He was also the founder-editor of *urmi*, the literary magazine of the West Hostel of Ravenshaw College, of which he was a resident. The magazine still continues and

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in honour of Mansinha, memorial lectures are organized in the hostel every year.

Although Mansinha had written a number of poems in his student days, it is the publication of *dhupa* (Incense), a collection of love lyrics in 1931; that catapulated him to great literary fame. These lively love lyrics with their mellifluous language and flowing metre gave expression to the passion of love with such intensity and candour that their popularity was instantaneous and lines of *dhupa* were on the lips of young and old alike. Mansinha's immediate predecessors, the Sabuja poets, had also written some excellent lyrics on love, nature and a variety of other subjects, but their thoughts were often nebulous and imgery farfetched. They sang of the fairies and languished for some imaginary beloved. In contrast, Mansinha's sensuous lyrics radiated liveliness and warmth which had the impression of some personal experience and made a direct appeal to the readers:

> Under this mango tree
> The bracelets of my beloved had embraced my neck the other day,
> The moonlit night was doubly enchanting in company with vernal breeze,
> And the sweet languishing note of the birds
> could be heard from distant woodlands,
> Moonlight and shadow had drawn magic patterns under the tree
> When my lovelorn beloved had passionately caught me in tight embrace
> Under this mango tree.

or

> Blessed is the house afar, where my beloved the pole-star of my life is confined
> Her sweet voice melts away on its walls

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And the stone floor bears the pleasant weight of her feet,
The fragrance of her body
Mixes in the sky of the courtyard
And the sweet tinkling sound of her anklets
Dissolves in its enclosed space

Is there any god who can convert my body into vernal breeze,
So that I can enter the prison house of my beloved through the
window
To wipe out tears from her cheeks,
And collect perspiration from her brow as precious treasure.
I will consider myself fortunate
If I could be the stone floor of that house,
So that my heart will throb and throb
With the touch of her lovely feet.

The passionate love of the lovers' secret meetings, the pangs of separation and the thoughts of a lovelorn heart find superb expression in the beautiful lyrics of *dhupa* which have been composed in different metres appropriate to the varying moods of love. Nature description is not wanting in these lyrics, but nature has been chiefly used as a complement to express different moods and situations in love. The following lines are from 'asadha-abhisar' (The monsoon tryst):

Lo, the fair woman leaving her own mansion
Is coming with slow steps to meet her lover,
The night is dark and the sky overcast with thick clouds,
Stars are scarcely visible, and the clouds burst with lightning,
The township is quiet, with no passersby on the road
The housewives have extinguished lights in their houses,
The earth is moist, and moist the cold wind,

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The frogs croak 'life and life';
At this hour of the night, lo, the woman of my age is coming,
To meet her lover in a tryst.

Spring is supposed to be the season of love. In the lyric 'basanta-birahi' (Separated lovers in spring) the pangs of lovers' separation have been expressed in a touching manner:

It is spring, but my beloved is not with me
She is confined elsewhere, as another man's wife,
If the beloved is a prisoner elsewhere;
Why has the *mandar* flower blossomed,
Whose tresses shall I decorate with it?
With whose lips shall I compare its colour,
O' why did the *mandar* flowers blossom?

In the preface to *dhupa* the poet has said that though he had some personal experiences in life befitting for poetry, he would not have dared to express them in the present form if he had not come in contact with the English poets. The free expression of personal experiences by the western poets had encouraged him to express some of his personal experiences in his own individual way often using some of the English metres. The lyrical grace, mellifluous language, and youthful expression of passionate love in *dhupa* has kept generations of Oriya readers spell-bound. This slender collection of love lyrics still remains the most popular of Mansinha's poetic compositions. The concluding poem of *dhupa* provides a touching finale:

When you will hear, O' my beloved,

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Your lover is no more in this world,
Do come near my ashes
And give them the shade of your body.
If you can, tread slowly on my ashes
So that by the touch of your lotus feet
I will regain life in the other world.

'prema o mrutya' (Love and death)

As revealed by Mansinha in private conversations, *dhupa* remained dearest to his heart till the end of his life. But this collection of poems which had brought to his unprecedented literary fame and popularity, had also created a storm of controversy in Oriya literary circle. Those who unabashedly relished naked description of loveplay in some medieval Oriya poetry and had no objection to the description of promiscuous love in the vast range of Vaishnavite literature had severly castigated Mansinha for distracting the minds of the young with immoral love poems. Mansinha had met the challenges of his critics by advancing arguments in support of his poetry.

As one moves from *dhupa* to *hema pushpa* (Golden flower) and *hema sashya* (Golden harvest) one notes a sea-change in the attitude of Mansinha toward woman and love. In *hema pushpa* he has paid homage to women 'first as mother, nurse of the world'. The sonnets included in *hema sashya* extol the joys of married love in its various phases and moods. It is significant to note that the poems in these collections were composed after the poet's marriage with Hemalata after whom the collections seem to have been named. Starting from

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the Italian poet Petrarch of the 13th century A.D., upto the English poets such as Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare and others, the short fourteen-lined poetic form sonnet has been used as a convenient medium to give expression to the sentiments of love. Mansinha has made dexterous use of this poetic form to express different kinds of thought of which the love sonnets included in *hema sashya* are some of his best. The following sonnet from *hema sashya* distinguishes love from infatuation:

My first love, O dear! worked in me like wine
Creating unquenchable thirst and hunger,
It enchanted and bewildered me
Filling my life with endless turmoils.

Being intoxicated I cast away all restraint
Forgetting self-honour and good of the world,
And roamed endlessly like the beguiled musk deer;
That period of infatuation is, however, over.

Now, O dear! the sacred Janhavi
Overflowing my frontyard has entered the house,
Drinking its nectar my great hunger is satisfied.

I have my rebirth with the end of the infatuation,
Your love works in me like nectar
After the effect of that heady wine.

'sura o sudha'(Wine & nectar)

The transition from *dhupa* to *hema sashya* is a transition of love from physical plane to the spiritual,

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from sensuous to the sublime. In some of the sonnets like 'mrutyu bhaya' (Fear of death), 'bhoga o tyaga' (Enjoyment and sacrifice), 'bhakti' (Devotion), 'prarthana' (Prayer), 'nitya swayambara' (Perpetual union), 'prem o siddhi' (Love and attainment), appearing in *hema sashya*, the sublime and serene aspects of love find beautiful expression. Conjugal love is not confined to this life alone, it transcends death and is immortal:

When death will block our path in this life
Shall we travel together in another way, in another form?
Shall we join the cluster of stars in the vast sky
And travel together as two luminaries along with the countless stars?
Or, O' dear, shall we return to this earth in another form,
to another country, as another people
to some cottage warm with love?

'hema sashya'

Love assumes universal dimensions in the following lines:

I want a million eyes to behold my beloved
As I am not content to look at her with my two eyes,
I want more tongues to speak to her
As my only tongue is not enough for it.
After embracing her with my two arms
My enamoured body wants more,
After kissing her to my heart's content
Fire again rises on my lips.
One heart is not enough to contain my love
A million hearts do I need,
Her thought shall make me forget all the rest
And being immersed in her I shall end my life.

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I pray, O God! dissolve me into the five elements
So that transcending all limits, my boundless love
Shall manifest itself in many ways;
Mixing myself with moonlight and vernal breeze
I shall give countless embraces to my beloved,
And being present in million of stars in the sky
My desire to behold her will be satisfied.

'hema sashya'

In the concluding poem of *hema sashya,* 'dharabatarana' the poet asks himself, is he coming to this earth again and again for complete fulfilment of his conjugal felicity?

O beloved, am I coming to this earth again and again
To get the complete surrender of those dreamy and serene eyes
Which are the true index of your noble soul?

Different facets of love with their subtle moods and nuances find expression in the numerous love poems of Mansinha which have earned him the reputation of being the foremost love poet in contemporary Oriya literature. Love has been the dominant theme of literature through the ages and ancient Oriya literature, particularly the vast store house of medieval poetry and Vaishnavite literature had a surfeit of it. Mansinha who was well-versed in Sanskrit, Oriya and western literatures and had intimate knowledge of Tagore's poetry has made intelligent use of his vast range of studies in the delineation of love as well as in the development of his poetic style. He was a lover of beauty and truth all his life in the Keatsian sense. Beauty of the human body, the

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sculptures of the Orissan temples; the paintings of Ajantas, Orissa or other school of arts, the beauties of nature and of human mind had equal attraction for him. His long dramatic poem *konarkara lasyalila* (The love dances of Konarka) in which the beautiful female forms on the temple-walls of Konarka come to life in a quiet moonlit night and fill the premises of the ruined temple with their lively dances to the accompaniment of instrumental music appropriate to the dance, is a marvellous example of the poet's high flight of romantic imagination. Mansinha was essentially a poet of dreams and powerful imagination. Every poet has to work with the world of the senses, but for Mansinha it was the instrument which set his visionary powers into action. Like Keats he had a deep passionate love for the world of the senses and was a master creftsman in giving visible shape to his sense perceptions. His creative faculties did not wane in his advanced years when he wrote his ambitious *kavya, kamalayana*, dealing with comtemporary life in which he has shown great imaginative and narrative skill in depicting the beauties of nature, lively love scenes and a vision of universal brotherhood and love.

Patriotism is another dominant note in the poetry of Mansinha. In many of his poems he has sung the glory of ancient Orissa and has expressed sorrow at the present miserable plight of a heroic people who once formed an extensive empire and had built the colossal temples at Konarka, Puri and Bhubaneswar and innumerable castles all over the land. The days of misery for Orissa began after she lost her independence and was subjugated by the Afgans, the Mughals and the Marathas in succession who exploited the land and

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fleeced the people for their own selfish end. With the British conquest in 1803, the ordeals did not end, which to some extent were mitigated only with the creation of a separate province for the Oriya-speaking people in 1936. It was quite natural for a self-conscious and sensitive poet like Mansinha to feel concerned for his people who were pushed to the lowest depths of misery and humiliation by the irony of fate. In one of his early poems, 'barabati', written in 1926, he is reminded of the past glory and the present misery of the Oriya people while looking at the ruined fort of Barabati still standing at Cuttak, the ancient capital of Orissa:

> With your fall, all the glory, pride and largeness of heart
> Have vanished like a dream,
> And great nation has been reduced to dust.
> Its kings no more return in majestic processions
> After subduing kingdoms,
> Its poor homesick people are now compelled to go elsewhere to beg
> at other men's feet.

In another of his famous early poems 'mahanadire jyotsna vihar', the same patriotic sentiments has been expressed. While enjoying a boat ride with friends in the river Mahanadi in a moonlit night the sight of the fort Barabati from the boat fills his mind with thoughts about Orissa's past and present:

> Will not the kings, the queens and the warriors return?
> Are they gone for ever,
> Will not the sands of this river ever kiss
> The feet of the beautiful damsels

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Who used to come here to offer ceremonial worship
to the sea-going vessels.
Will not the fort raise its head again?
Shall not the women of the city receive the royal boats
Coming by this river laiden with pearls
Singing welcome songs in their melodious voice.
Those halcyon days are over;
Why not God put an end to this race
After those glorious days were over;
It is more painful than death
To live in this world as mere skeletons.

These poems of Mansinha remind one of the patriotic poems of George Seferis, the first Greek poet to be honoured with the Nobel prize for literature in 1963. While recalling the glories of ancient Greece, Seferis in his heart-touching verses has bemoaned the present degeneration and decay of the Greek people and has invoked his countryman to fight for a better future. Mansinha, whose poems were composed much earlier to that of Seferis, has expressed the same sentiments for his own land in several of his other poems as well. His poems — 'boita bandana', 'tapoi bilapa' and kavya *sadhaba jhia* — based on legends bring to focus the maritime activities of the Sadhabas (traders) of ancient Orissa who had enriched the country by their overseas-trade. He has also paid respectful homage to the great sons of Orissa like the famous astronomer Samanta Chandrasekhara, poet Radhanath Ray, the friend and saviour of the lepers Dr. Isac Santara, and has written a number of poems on Utkalamani Gopabandhu Das, the great leader of the Oriya people whose heart had bled for the poverty-stricken millions of Orissa.

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Conditions of the Oriyas were so miserable prior to the formation of the separate province of Orissa in 1936, that no sensible and self-respecting Oriya could keep himself away from the distressing conditions to which the Oriya speaking people were put. It was by the concerted efforts of the people from all walks of life that a separate province for the Oriyas could be possible. Against this background the patriotic poems of Mansinha relating to Orissa should not be construed as shortsighted or parochial. His literary canvas was too wide and vision too broad to admit of any such limited view of life. His admiration for the art of Ajanta and Elephanta as revealed in two of his poems of the same name is no less than his appreciation of the sculptural beauties of Konarka. His collection of poems entitled *bapu tarpana* is entirely devoted to Gandhiji, the Father of the Nation, who had sacrificed his life for the freedom of the country and for the alleviation of the sufferings of millions of Indians. The poet's concern for the future of India has been expressed in the following line:

O Father! shall my half-naked countrymen
Afflicted with disease, prematurely old, with little hope, and short lived
Ever flourish again in free India
And breathe the free air of hope, enjoyment and wellbeing?
O Father! shall my thirty crore countrymen
Stand on their feet again
Being healthy of body and mind
And diffuse the radiance of free soul and self-contentment.

'bhabishyat bharatbarsa' (India of the future)

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In the poem 'agrani bharat' (India in the vanguard) he has paid homage to India as the spiritual guide and teacher of the world, and in 'raha bharatiya' (Wait, oh Indian) he has exhorted Indian youth to remain rooted to their own tradition and culture while taking whatever is best in other cultures. The poet's vision of universal love and brotherhood has been admirably conveyed through his full-length kavya *kamalayana*.

The romantic poets have an irresistible attraction for the beauties of nature. Mayadhar Mansinha being essentially a lyric poet, did not have the scope of his predecessor Radhanath Ray, to give lengthy descriptions of nature, as the latter did in his long narrative poems. Even then Mansinha has not forgotten to avail every opportunity to depict nature in his narrative pieces like *sadhava jhia, jema, subhadrusti* and *upekshita* as necessary background relevant to the theme. In his *kavya* the *kamalayana*, particularly in the second part of it, he has given extensive description of the beauties of the Chilka lake and its surrounding landscape with which he was intimately associated from his childhood days. Biswamitra, the heroine of the second part of *kamalayana*, with her Russian friend enjoys a boat-ride in a moonlit night in Chilka:

The boat moves swiftly cutting across the waves of the Chilka lake,
With the blue mountains behind looking like a beautiful painting.
In front, against the distant horizon
Are visible the pale line of scattered trees,
Of the extensive shore of Parikud and Malud islands

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Between the mountain range behind
And the distant horizon in front
Are spread the waters of the Chilka
Like liquid emeralds,
Reflecting now on its waves myriads of golden moonbeams
And countless golden necklaces.

The beauty of the sunset over Chilka is also described with equal deftness:

The sun is setting behind the Vallery mountains,
And the quiet shadow of the evening
Crossing the mountain peaks spreads swiftly to the borderland
of Chilka,
The golden flames of the closing day
Are still burning on distant Khandahana peak,
And on the top of the old banyan tree on the Vallery mountain.

Beautiful vignettes of nature can also be noticed in many of the lyric poems of Mansinha. When the poet is returning to his native place by train with the newly wedded bride by his side, Chilka comes on the way:

Tarry a while, O steam locomotive!
The fair lady will see through her blue eyes
How the blue waters of the Chilka with its bare beauty
Is outspread up to the blue horizon.
Poet Radhanath Ray, the great worshipper of nature,
In mellifluous verse has described the beauty of the charming lake
Which my beloved has read, hence her curiosity.
Stop a while, O steam-propelled vehicle!
Let my doe-eyed beloved making her eyes still wider,

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Enjoy the beauty of the lake, let her blue eyes
Come in intimate contact with the blue waters of the Chilka

'chilka'

In another poem in *hema sashya* the poet is introducing his newly married wife to the beauties of his native place:

After getting down from the steam locomotive
You will go to that land which outskirts the sea,
With its golden sands streching far and wide
Sans vegetation, in naked splendour.
The damsels of the sea play hide and seek at night
Amidst the *keoda* bushes on the shore
Their light feet never sinking into the sand.
When monsoon sets in the *punnaga* blooms
With its sweet smell setting on fire the hearts of separated lovers
The huge waves of the stormy sea
Created with water particles shaped like powdered diamond
Wash the feet of that land,
And their loud roar creates perpetual drumming sound.
My modest home is situated in this land
Come dear! the does of the land will learn
The art of ogling from your enchanting eyes.

'priya bhumi'

Mansinha who hailed from the village and had spent his most impressionable childhood and boyhood days in rural surroundings has written some poems on rural life which bring out the joys and sorrows of the simple village folk in a touching manner. The poems such as 'rangoon chithi', 'gharapasa' (The homesick), 'nasta

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pally' (The devastated village), 'anudha'. (The unmarried woman) and 'kanta kacha' (Measurement for bangles) included in his poetry collection *matibani* give a faithful picture of the sorrows and sufferings of the poverty-stricken rural folk of Orissa. Poems like 'palli sandhya', 'barsa sandhya' etc., appearing in the same collection are beautiful vignettes of nature in rural Orissa. Perhaps after Nandakishore Bal no other contemporary Oriya poet had depicted Orissa's village-life with such understanding and sympathy as Mansinha.

Mansinha's broad humanism and reforming zeal had made him inclined toward Buddism toward the later part of his life and he had composed some poems on Buddhist lore like 'patitapabana buddha', 'buddham saranam gachhami', an one act play *buddha duti* (Woman messenger of Buddha) and a full-length play *buddha* with a scholarly introduction extolling the Buddhist tenets, but he was never an other-worldly. Like Rabindranath Tagore he loved this world dearly,

> I don't want heaven or redemption
> I want to live in this strange world
> With all its joys and sorrows.

'mukti nahi mage' (I don't want redemption)

and enjoyed its sensuous beauties to his heart's content which are reflected in several of his poems. Like Blake, Wordsworth and other distinguished romantic poets, he has also often travelled from the sensuous world to the extra-sensuous mystic world and has tried to realise the ultimate reality behind all appearances:

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On some days while looking at the starry sky
I think of the mysteries of creation,
By whose direction countless worlds are moving in the outer space,
Which jeweller has studded the vast canopy of the blue sky
With particles of diamond bound together by living laws.
Millions of suns like ants with their families
Are moving in the sky from time immemorial
To some unknown destination. Who set in motion
This vast universe? Who created the cosmos?
In reply to all these queries we come to realise its creator
Whose glory strikes us with awe.

'birat srasta' (The great creator)

In an interesting poem 'shrikrishna', the poet who did not believe in idolatry has described Shrikrishna as a universal figure:

Whose blueness of body is spread over the outer space
Who wears yellow clothes at dawn and sunset
And whose peacock feather-plume is like lightning in the cloud—
At the feet of that beautiful Krishna I offer my worship.

In a sequence of five sonnets entitled *bibhu o prakruti* (God and nature) the poet has described the beauties of the five prominent seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer, rains and autumn with a pantheistic vision. Mansinha was deeply spiritual, though he did not follow any particular religious creed nor had respect for idolatry. In his book *krusha* (Cross), a collection of one hundred sonnets, the poet has poured in his heart's anguish for the sufferings. He knows that he shall have to carry his own cross, but his heart cries

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for the grace of the Almighty to lend him support in the arduous journey of life:

Who has nailed me to the cross of
disease; disappointments, calumny and despair?
Why is my life afflicted with thousand wounds
And I am lashed with the thorn of humiliation.
The thorn crown of foolishness is tied to my head
And I am bitten by a thousand snakelike ugly thirsts.

Like a blind while hurrying on life's road
I have been whipped on the back with cruel frequency.

Being afflicted with sorrow and disappointments, I bleed
And feel thirsty, and cry for your drop of kindness,
Don't disappoint me Father! O imperishable One,
Where is your wisdom, guidance and mercy?

Mansinha's poetic creations are many and varied. Besides numerous lyrics, he is the author of six *kavyas* and some poetic dramas. His large number of sonnets mostly follow the Shakespearean pattern of three quatrains followed by a couplet.Though he followed the traditional poetic metre, its variety and skilful use never make his poetry monotonous. He also composed some beautiful elegies on the death of Mahatma Gandhi, Utkalmani Gopabandhu, his Marxist friend Bhagabati Panigrahi and on untimely death of his own little daughter. The four elegies written on the death of his daughter are extremely heart-touching. It is significant to note how he has raised a great personal loss to the impersonal level where he comes face to face with God:

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In the great creative flow in the solar system
Hundreds of birth and deaths are taking place every moment,
In that context what is the significance of the little child
Who was in this world for two years?
Even in that short span of life
I saw the great drama of life, death and deluge
More clearly than what all knowledge could teach me,
And learnt what is to be learnt from life and death.
I shed tears due to my fond attachment only,
Now I realise that the loss of my precious treasure
Has brought me face to face with God
What all my knowledge and endless studies had failed to achieve.

'sisura dana' (Gift of the child)

Mansinha has also made some significant contribution to children's literature. Most of his verses written for children have been collected and published under the title *kishore kabita.*

A comprehensive assessment of Dr. Mansinha's contribution to Oriya literature is yet to be made. He dominated Oriya literature, particularly Oriya poetry, for about four decades and enriched it by his own individual contributions. He was well-read in Sanskrit, Oriya, Western and Indian literatures and while maintaining continuity with rich tradition of Oriya poetry has added new dimensions to its manifold splendour.

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IV

A HUMANIST POET

Besides love, humanism is the most dominant note in the poetry of Mansinha. Quite early in life he had written a group of poems *talia jeevanara bilap* (Cry of the underlings), in which he had expressed his sympathy with the sorrows and sufferings of the rickshaw puller, day labourer, peasant, carpenter, clerk, artist, school teacher and other neglected people in the society and had exhorted them to fight for a better future. In a poem 'bhulija itihas' (Forget history) he had written:

> The poor has no right to think of a better living,
> It is a dream for him what the dog of the capitalist gets,
> What use history which is full of stories of the kings and the rich,
> Is there any record of the sufferings of the poor cottage-dweller?
> Forget history, forget about the victories and defeats of the kings,
> Forget the differences of caste and religion to usher in a new age in the world.

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The French Revolution of 1789 A.D., with its emphasis on liberty, equality and fraternity, had brought in a new awakening in the western world freeing it from medieval bondage. The 19th century Romantic movement in western literature with its reaction to the rigid formality of the 18th century classical literature, its assertion of individual vision and change of interest from kings and queens to the problems of common man were essentially a part of the revolutionary fervour that had shaken the western world. Though echoes of the message of French Revolution could be heard in modern Indian literatures, in the twenties and thirties of this century, it is the Russian Revolution of 1917 in which the proletariats had captured power, produced a tremendous impact in the international sphere giving rise to a spurt of socialistic literature which was termed as Progressive Literature. Orissa had also its share of Progressive Literature of which late Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi, the Jnanpith award winner poet Sachidananda Routroy and late Ananta Patnaik were talented pioneers. Mayadhar Mansinha was intimately associated with the marxist scholar and litterateur Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi on whose premature death he had written two elegies. It is quite likely that Mansinha, like his two famous contemporaries, the former Sabuja poets, Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, the elder brother of Bhagabati, and the mystic poet Baikunthanath Patnaik was also bitten by the marxist bug and sang with equal ease of the rickshawpuller on the one hand, and his lady love under the mango tree on the other. But Mansinha was not a man of politics. His sympathy for the poor and the deprived was more prompted by a deeper human understanding than

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any political ideology. The two poems under the title 'bhagini' (Sister) and 'kanta kacha' (The sample measurement for bangles) written on his poor sister, as well as the poem 'santa ma' (Grandmother), reveal the tender heart of the poet which was basically kind and sympathetic. 'Anudha' (Unmarried woman), another early poem of Mansinha, expresses the life-long sufferings and agony of an old maid of his village who had to remain unmarried as she was made a social outcast for taking food from public-charity during famine. The poem 'rangoon chithi' (Letter from Rangoon) brings out with all poignancy the long wait of a poor mother for a letter from her son who had gone to distant Rangoon as a day-labourer. The poet was also equally kind and sympathetic toward birds and animals. In the poem 'hansa hatya' (Killing of a swan) the poet has expressed his sorrow and repentance for having killed a swan in his boyhood days which like the repentance of the sailor in Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner* for killing the albatross, haunted him all his life.

Mansinha's humanism has assumed wider perceptive in his later poetry. Widespread human misery and sufferings in God's creation have made him sceptical about divine benevolence. In one of his early poems, 'nidrita bhagawan' (Sleeping God) written in 1928, the poet wrote:

> Where are you asleep O God!
> When the divine child is making tryst with hell.

The poet's reforming zeal was also inspired by his deep concern for human weal. In many of his

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poems he has expressed the view that a society divided by caste and religious barriers and ridden with superstitions and dogmas cannot make any progress. He has blamed the priests for perpetrating the caste hierarchy, elaborate religious rituals and idolatry in the Hindu religious order for their own selfish end. Hindu society is doomed if it does not come out of centuries of religious and social bondage imposed on it by the priestly class. In the poem 'nirday brahmin' (Cruel brahmin) the poet has shown how a brahmin did not save the life of a drowning untouchable child lest his caste will be polluted by the foul-touch. In the poem 'deva puja' (Worshipping God) he tells the readers that God is not to be worshipped in the dark sanctum of the temple, as the real gods, the Naranarayan, are waiting outside to be served:

> Look Brahmin! to your front and behind
> Hundreds of gods in human form are waiting,
> Can you get God sidetracking them?
> Whom are you worshipping in the dark dungeon of the temple
> Being afraid to touch the real gods who are left outside.
> It is sin, not piety, for which the god has become dumb
> And does not utter a word in spite of all your worship.
> Know ye priest, the god has left the country for the sins perpetrated by you
> Only the gods of wood and stone are found in the temples.
> Instead of worshipping the god of stone and wood, come and worship the living gods,
> Whose eyes will shed tears of joy if you speak to them a few kind words.
> Stop the chanting of your incantations, stop the offer of lighted camphor,
> There are thousands of gods waiting outside with outstretched hands,

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Give the food offerings of the deities to these hungry gods
And see god in every human habitation.
With that worship the dumb god will be vocal in no time
And the neighbours will exchange among themselves the words of god.
Come devotees, come priest, don't enter the dark dungeon any more,
In the divine light outside, search for the gods personified.

His views against priesthood are also voiced in the poem 'anabashyaka madhyastha' (The unnecessary middle man). For communion with god, there is no need of a middleman or priest, nor is there any necessity to go to the forest forsaking the world. Self-surrender to the Supreme Creator with a clean heart and childlike simplicity is the best way to reach Him. It is not only the Hindu religion which is suffering from the pernicious effects of religious taboos, superstition and priestly domination, the same is true in case of other religions of the world as well. In the poem 'namaskar' (Salute-1) the poet writes:

O God of the clergy and the priest
I don't salute thee,
O God of the temple and the Church
Of the Maulavi and the Mullas
I don't salute thee,
I salute those helpless men and women
Who to establish your divine will
Have made the pages of history wet with their tears.

Though Mansinha had no fascination for any particular religion, in later life he seems to have been inclined toward Buddhism. In the scholarly introduction to his play *buddha* he has extolled the tenets of Buddhism

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which are based on self-purification, piety,universal love and kindness. It is a humanitarian religion which does not believe in caste or priesthood. Mansinha who was a crusader for social and religious reforms must have found a satisfying answer to his queries in the teachings of Lord Buddha which are essentially humanistic. He has glorified Buddha and his teachings in some of his poems based on Buddhistic lore.

Mansinha has composed some poems in praise of those who had sacrificed their lives in the service of the poor and the down-troden. His poems on Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das, Mahatma Gandhi or the scarcely known humanitarian doctor of the lepers, Isac Santara, come under this category. In his praise for humanitarian service he had made no distinction of race or nationality. While condemning a Brahmin in the poem 'nirdaya brahmin' for not saving the life of a drowning untouchable child in the fear of loosing his caste, in the poem 'manabika ingrej' (The humanitarian Englishman) he has praised a highly placed English Official for carrying on his shoulders a helpless cholera patient from the roadside while many Hindus and Muslims were callously passing by without taking any notice of him.

In *kamalayana*,Mansinha has made a novel experiment in writing a full-length *kavya* in two parts based on contemporary life. This *kavya* with its elaborate story and broad canvas has characters from different races, religions and nationalities who rub shoulders with each other in perfect harmony and are bound together as the poet says, 'by a common thread,

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the golden thread of humanism'. Kamal, the main character of the *kavya*, is introduced in the 1st Canto as a volunteer distributing relief in a famine affected area under the benevolent guidance of Utkalmani Gopabandhu. Later Kamal has married Karuna, the daughter of a liberal minded Bengali Professor in the college, who as a member of the terrorist movement in Bengal had fired at the Governor of Bengal and other White people at the convocation of the Calcutta University severely wounding the Governor and killing two White Professors. When as a journalist Kamal goes to the U.S.A. with his wife Karuna, and stays in New York, intimate contact with the people of different races and nationalities widen their social relationship. When Karuna gives birth to her daughter Biswamitra, Miss Watson, a member of the International Red Cross, takes care of the child as a loving nurse. Karuna repents for her past terrorist activities when she comes to know that she had killed Miss Watson's Professor-Father in Calcutta. The stay in cosmopolitan America helps in developing an international outlook in Kamal and Karuna which makes no distinction between one nation and another. During the second World War they go to China as volunteers to serve the Chinese people who were wounded by Japanese bombing. Service to mankind had become their avowed faith. Says Kamal:

> Surpassing the distinction of race, nationality and religion
> Is it not proper for human heart
> to extend its sympathy to those who suffer?
> Humanity is greater than nation,
> Human suffering through million voices
> Is crying for its alleviation.

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After their humanitarian activities abroad, Kamal and Karuna finally come back to Kamal's native village and start 'Karuna Ashram' to serve the poor people in the rural areas. Though born in an orthodox Brahmin family Kamal had given his widowed sister in marriage to a Christian youth against all social opposition which reflects his humanistic attitude and reforming zeal.

After the death of Kamal and Karuna, Kamal's younger brother Swami Mahananda, a saintly character, who had joined the Ramakrishna Mission, and Miss Watson take care of Kamal's daughter Biswamitra. Biswamitra was born and brought up in international atmosphere and had friends from different nationalities. She was in love with a Russian young man who died fighting for Hungarian independence against the aggression of Communist Russia. This was a great shock for Biswamitra, but overcoming her personal loss she decided to follow the foot-prints of her noble parents. Along with an English friend she prepared herself to go to strife torn Europe to preach the message of universal love and non-violence of Lord Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi. Through the character of Swami Mahananda, the poet has shown the greatness of India's spirituality, universal love and spirit of sacrifice.

Kalalayana with its international setting, diverse episodes and a host of Indian and foreign characters, appears somewhat rambling and incoherent as a *kavya*. But it is probably Mansinha's most conspicuous work which brings to clear focus his ideals of humanism and reforming fervour. That there is a wide gap between

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ideal and reality, the poet is well aware of it:

> It seems science has turned the wide world into one family,
> But that is only in appearance.
> The new age in human history will only begin
> When entire humanity will overcome violence, hypocrisy
> And by breaking the barriers of party, creed, religion and language,
> Enshrine the idea of one universal family, one world nation,
> One God and universal brotherhood in its heart.

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V

HIS OTHER WORKS

Though essentially a poet, Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha has also distinguished himself as a powerful writer of prose, both in Oriya and English. His stay in England for higher studies had given him an opportunity to come in close contact with the social and cultural life of the English people which he has recorded with his own observations and comments in a simple and interesting manner in his travelogue *paschima pathika* (Traveller to the West). Mansinha had gone to England in the late thirties when foreign trvel, particularly in Orissa, was not as common as it is now. When his travel accounts were first serialized in the *Nababharata*, the reputed Oriya literary magazine, edited by Pandit Nilakantha Das, they were avidly read by the educated mass in Orissa. Mansinha had gone to England with meagre resources and had to manage there with utmost austerity, often cooking his own food. During his stay in England, he made time to visit places of interest and also English countryside. He has observed English social and cultural life with keen insight and has

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admired certain noble traits in an Englishman's character like sense of duty, discipline, hardwork, punctuality, good manners etc. which in a way also formed a part and parcel of his own character. While admiring the noble traits of British national character he has not forgotten the bright sides of his own national culture and has always taken pride in India's spiritual superiority.

As a literary critic and writer of essays on different social and cultural subjects Mansinha made significant contribution to Oriya literature. Some of his essays were published in two collections, *kavi o kavita* and *odia samaj o sahitya*. Mansinha was a poet of beauty, joy and truth and this was amply reflected in his literary essays. In his three learned discourses on Rabindranath Tagore, included in *kavi o kavita*, he has discussed at length that it is not the poet's way to go in quest of the Absolute by abandoning the world. Through his sensuous enjoyment of the world and by the sacrifice of his ego he can go beyond the senses and realise the ultimate reality. In his essay on *Radhanath O Madhusudan* Mansinha has paid tributes to poet Radhanath Ray who was essentially a poet of senses, beauty and valour, and paid regards to Bhaktakavi Madhusudan for his saintly character whose poetry, according to him, was a projection of his own saintliness. In modern Oriya poetry Mansinha was the last and probably the most important successor to the romantic tradition of the poet Radhanath Ray and his literary assessments were often tinged with certain a priori notions relating to poetry, and literature in general. In many cases his critical approach was emotional rather than influenced by strict critical intelligence. This is evident in the unrestrained praise for his favourite Vaishnab poet Gopal Krushna,

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in the two essays entitled *Gopal Krushna Padyabali* , which is more in the nature of a personal admiration for the great poet's works than having any disciplined critical judgement. Mansinha's personal likes and dislikes became more conspicuous in his assessment of modern Oriya poetry of the Post- Second World War and Post-Independence period as revealed in his essay, *nutan kavitar tanutyaga* in his *History of Oriya Literature* Being a traditionalist himself in poetic style and technique, he failed to appreciate the new poetry that had emerged as a result of the changed conditions of life after the second World War. The change in poetic temper, style and thought-contents that took place in the post-war world was an international phenomenon and it was not possible for Oriya poetry to remain unaffected by the new trends.

The collection of essays entitled *odia samaj o sahitya* contains some thought provoking discussions on social and literary topics. 'Oriya jatira baisisthya', included in this selection was the presidential address of the author at the Prabasi Utkal Sahitya Sammilani held in Calcutta in 1941. In this address citing the example of the adventurous Englishmen who go to different corners of the world in search of vocation, Mansinha pleaded for the dissolution of the joint family system and the caste system in Indian society without which people will not feel free and will never learn to be self-dependent. He criticised prevailing superstitions, blind beliefs and predominance of the priests in Hindu society in strongest terms and remarked that in spite of its high philosophy Hinduism as practised currently was the most barbarous system in the world. In another essay 'jiva-dharma' he exorted the Oriyas to follow the German philosopher Nietzsche's dictum 'will to power',

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to get Orissa out of the present morass of degeneration and decay. Elsewhere he also lashed out at the Oriya Sabuja poets for their blatant imitation of Tagore and the Sabuja poets of Bengal as was seen in his essay 'para dharma.' which included in this collection.

Under the auspices of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, Dr. Mansinha wrote a monograph in English on Fakir Mohan Senapati, the great novelist and short-story writer of Orissa. His *saraswati fakir mohan* is a well-written biography in Oriya of the same illustrious son of Orissa, who was not only a famous writer and capable administrator, but also a great leader of the Oriya people at a most critical period of Orissa's history. While making use of all the available material in writing this biography, Mansinha also discussed at length the valuable contributions of Fakir Mohan to the making of modern Oriya literature. *Sikhyabitra gatha* (The story of an educationist) is an autobiographical account in which Mansinha recorded bitter experiences of his life as a litterateur and a government servant. He had his own strong opinion on matters of social, literary and educational, which he expressed freely without fear or fervour, for which he had to incur the displeasure of many, but nothing could make him compromise with his avowed principles. While serving in the Education Department, he even did not hesitate to criticise the accepted educational policies of the Government which he did not approve of, and pointed out the errors of his political and bureaucratic bosses when they were wrong. For such defiant attitude he was harassed by his bosses and was frequently transferred from one post to another and at times was without a job. But all the same he used his powerful pen in exposing his detractors and in asserting his view-points with convincing arguments.

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Sikhyabitra gatha makes interesting reading as a human document. It draws sympathy and admiration for the talented poet and writer who had to suffer at the hands of others for his love of truth and forthrightness.

Mansinha wrote about ten plays which include a full-length social play *nastanida*, a historical play *barabati*, a play on the life and teachings of Lord Buddha and short one-act plays like *rajkavi upendra, puspita, durbikhya, buddha duti, sansara chakra, puspabhinaya* and the poetic drama *pujarini*. Many of these plays use both prose and poetry dialogue, and have introduced a number of songs and lengthy dialogues which appear old fashioned. Some of these plays also introduce *sutradhara, nata,* and *nati* in the tradition of old Sanskrit plays. The song and poetry portion of the plays are of some interest to the readers as they are from the pen of an accomplished poet. But the plays excepting *pujarini* could not attract much attention. *Pujarini* was a highly enjoyable poetic drama which had for its theme the legendary love episode of Sakhigopal, the presiding deity of Satyabadi, near Puri, and Laxmi, the beautiful daughter of the temple-priest. Written in his youthful days, this poetic drama had all the warmth and sensuous appeal of love at the human physical level, and at the same time its poetry was as lyrical and enchanting as that of *dhupa* which was written during the same period.

Mansinha also wrote one novel *anwesana* (Quest) and tried his hand in short-story writing. He translated into Oriya the Buddhist text *dharmapada* and wrote a scholarly commentary on the *bhagabat gita* of which he was a great admirer, and recommended it for every youth to read. Being appointed the chief compiler of *oriya encyclopaedia* by the

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Utkal University, he had the ambitious plan to compile the *oriya encyclopaedia* in several volumes in the model of 'Encyclopaedia Britanica' and had started working in that direction. But as he has painfully narrated in his *sikhyabitra gatha*, his dreams were shattered by the jealousy and intrigues of some who had little interest in such noble endeavour. Against heavy odds he somehow succeeded in bringing out a short Oriya Encyclopaedia in four volumes. With his range of studies, erudition and devotion to work Mansinha was eminently suitable for such a challenging work, but circumstances did not permit him to realise his dream.

In his multifaceted literary activities, Mansinha had distinguished himself as a competent editor of some reputed literary periodicals. As a student, he was the first editor of *urmi*, the literary magazine of his hostel in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, and after his return from England he edited *arati* which, though short-lived, was immensely popular among the readers for its selection of articles, careful editing and artistic get-up. The famous artist late B. Varma was its art designer and had drawn a beautiful multi-coloured cover design for it. While working as the Educational Adviser to the Eastern States Agency, with the financial assistance received from the the then ruling family of Bamonda who were well known for their patronage to art and literature, Mansinha brought out a monthly literary magazine entitled *sankha* which maintained a high level of excellence, and brought many talented young poets and writers to limelight. His learned editorials with bold expression of views on different topics were a major attraction for the readers. For sometime he also edited the *swarajya*, a daily Oriya newspaper from Bhubaneswar,

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and toward the last part of his life had tried to revive the famous literary monthly *utkala sahitya* of late Biswanath Kar, of which only one issue was published under his editorship.

Mansinha was a forceful writer in English and his English works like the *History of Oriya Literature* and *Saga of the Land of Jagannatha* are highly appreciated for their scholarship, presentation and critical acumen. Instead of giving a chronological catalogue of names, Mansinha in his *History of Oriya Literature* focussed attention on literary trends and the trend-setters and gave due importance to those who had made substantial contribution to the growth and development of Oriya literature. This was a new and bold approach of Mansinha in writing *History of Oriya Literature* on western model. That his *History of Oriya Literature* was greatly successful in its basic purpose of acquainting the non-Oriya readers with the essentials of Oriya literature was amply proved by the favourable review it received from literary critics and several Indian newspapers and periodicals. Commenting on the book, *Shankar's Weekly* in its issue of 24 March 1964, had written: 'Dr. Mansinha's *History of Oriya Literature* is both revealing and rewarding. He is fair and objective in his assessment of trends and individual authors, though, of course, he makes no secrecy of his own admiration for particular authors. The literary historian need not abdicate his aesthetic preferences, so long as these do not come in the way of his judgement. If he is a little harsh on the so-called moderns, we may well believe that he is so only because he sees literary jejuneness being palmed off as profundity.'

In the *Saga of the Land of Jagannatha*, Mansinha has made an ambitious attempt to present the Cultural history

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of Orissa in a single volume containing about three hundred pages. In the 'Author's Note', the writer with all humility says, 'Small and inadequate that this writer is, it has been one of his cherished dreams, for years past, to write a book that might convey to interested readers outside Orissa, a not-unfair or inaccurate picture of the rich and varied culture of her historic people, the Oriyas.' He has dedicated the book to the memory of his Hungarian Indologist friend, Dr. Charles Fabri, who on his request had written a valuable book on the art and architecture of Orissa. In the *Saga of the Land of Jagannatha*, Mansinha has dealt at length on the land, the people, art, architecture, literature, dance, music, festivals and lives of modern torch-bearers of Orissa, like Utkal Gourab Madhusudan Das, Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Radhanath Ray, Madhusudan Rao, Gangadhar Meher, and the great astronomer, Samanta Chandrasekhar. He has written two separate chapters on the two important religious cults of Orissa, the Jagannath Cult and the Alekh Cult. The Jagannath Cult is a grand synthesis of diverse religious denominations like Saivism, Vaisnavism, Shaktism, Ganapati cult, the concept of Void etc. The broad-base Jagannath cult has attracted the religious leaders of different faiths to Puri through the ages and they have founded their own religious monasteries or maths at Puri, the seat of Lord Jagannath. The Alekh Cult which is living faith in Orissa with many adherents is supposed to be a reformed form of Buddhism having for its tenets a casteless society, recognition of one God who is Alekh or Void, abandonment of religious rituals, stress on ethical way of living and on thoughts related to the good of humanity as a whole. Mansinha has compared the Alekh Cult founded by Mahima Gosain in the 19th century with the Brahmo Samaj of

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Raja Rammohan Roy and has observed: 'That obscure prophet of Orissa has also left behind a new religion, a new church and a new literature, exactly like the celebrated founder of Brahmo Samaj of Bengal. But while Rammohan's once sensational non-conformist religion is practically a spent up force by now, the cult ushered in by his most illiterate counterpart in contemporary Orissa is still a vigorously living faith, with an ever-growing number of adherents in and outside Orissa.' Mansinha has also paid high tributes to the saint-poet of this cult, Bhima Bhoi, a Khond, whose devotional songs have made the Alekh Cult widely popoular in Orissa. The value of the book has been enhanced by the inclusion of some rare maps and numerous photoplates.

In addition to his doctoral thesis on Kalidas and Shakespeare, and monograph on Fakir Mohan Senapati. Mansinha also contributed many scholarly articles in English on Orissa's art, architecture and literature to several all-India journals and translated some of his own selected poems into English which have been subsequently published under the title *Ripples of Mahanadi.*

Thus at the end it may be said that from 1905 to 1973, for long 68 years, it was a life of struggle, dedication and truimph. Dr. Mansinha was a fine poet, a fine person, a fine soul, a rare spirit that comes among men who by his activities in one branch of life or other adds to the glory and taste of life. Dr. Mansinha chose literature and through literature he expanded the dimensions of life.

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Mayadhar Mansinha's Literary Works

Verse Anthologies

dhupa (1931); *sedinara kabitā; hema sasya* (1933); *hema puspa* (1935); *prema sasya* (1945); *bāpu tarpan; konārka; akhyata; mātibāni* (1947); *jiban cithi* (1947); *krusa; gita renu; kisor kabitā; swarājyāsrama; sindhu o bindu*

Kavyas

upekhitā (1928); *nikwana; suva drusti* (1930); *jemā* (1947); *sādhaba jhia* (1946); *kamalāyana*

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Plays and playlets

rājakabi upendra (1928); *bārabāti; nastanida* (1938); *pujārini* (1932); *puspitā* (1930); *puspābhinaya; sāsana cakra* (1951); *buddha duti; durbhikhya; buddha* (1951)

Travelogue

pascima pathika (1947)

Biography

saraswati fakir mohan (1972)

Autobiography

sikhyābitara gātha (1965)

Novel

anwesana

Essays and Criticism

kabi o kabitā (1948); *odiā samāj o sāhitya* (1951); *odiā sāhityar itihās* (1967); *mātira mahākabi sāralā dās; sāhitya pravā; gitā māhātmya; sārbajanina gitā; jiban patha; sikhya, sikhyaka o sikhyātana*

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Translations and Editing

mahat bāni; grāmonnatira romānckar kāhāni; dharmapada (with commentary); *shrimad bhagabat gita* (with commentary); Edited oriya periodicals: *urmi,;* *ārati,; utkala sāhitya* (new edition), ; *swarājya* (Daily)

Works in English

Citizen Education; Dreams in Education; The Saga of the Land of Jagannath (1971); *The History of Oriya Literature* (1962); *Kalidas and Shakespeare; Fakir Mohan Senapati; Ripples of Mahanadi*

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MAYADHAR MANSINHA (1905-1973) was the doyen of modern Oriya romantic poetry. In his deft hands Oriya lyric and narrative poetry assumed new dimensions and reached a high level of perfection. Though essentially a poet, he also wrote plays, travelogue, essays, literary criticism, biography, autobiography and children's literature leaving his own individual mark on each of the genre. His strong individualism, reformist zeal, bold expression of views, and relentless fight against mediocrity often created a storm in Oriya literary and cultural circles warming up literary and intellectual discussions. His scholarly works in English entitled *Cultural History of Orissa : The Saga of the Land of Jagannath : Kalidas and Shakespeare,* and *The History of Oriya Literature* are also highly acclaimed, in this monograph.

Durga Charan Kuanr (b. 1925), a distinguished poet and critic in Oriya and editor of *Panchajanya,* a reputed literary quarterly, traces the literary career of Mayadhar Mansinha and highlights his contribution to Oriya literature.

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